(b) the steps proposed to be taken up to decongest the traffic in existing international air terminals?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF CIVIL AVIATION (SHRI PRAFUL PATEL): (a) Presently 14 airports in the country are designated as international airports. In order to promote international connectivity out of points in India, bilateral rights are being exchanged liberally with foreign countries. As far as the Indian carriers are concerned, they are free to operate from any airport in India. However, actual operations are left to the commercial judgement of the airlines and traffic demand.

(b) Upgradation/renovation/expansion and consequent decongestion is a continuous process linked with traffic growth. Government is taking several measures to reduce congestion both on airside and terminals. These include construction of taxi tracks, parking bays/stands on airside. Similarly domestic terminal capacity at Delhi and Mumbai airports are being expanded. International terminals at Delhi and Mumbai are being renovated. Steps are also being undertaken to introduce Common User Terminal Equipment, in-line baggage screening etc. at several airports for quick facilitation of passengers. Air traffic management systems are also being reviewed to increase aircraft movement.

Fixation of oil prices

†*364. SHRIMATI SAVITA SHARDA: Will the Minister of PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are seriously considering to restore the right to fix domestic retail prices of petrol and diesel to the oil companies;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) by when a final decision is likely to be taken in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRI MANI SHANKAR AIYAR): (a) to (c) Since the end of 2003, there has been an unprecedented, sharp and spiraling increase in international oil prices combined with considerable week-to-week and even day-to-day volatility. The Indian basket of crude oil touched an all-time high of US $ 52.83 per bbl on 04-04-2005 compared to an average price of US $ 27.96 per bbl in 2003-04 and US $ 39.21 per bbl in 2004-05. There has since been some

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

softening, the Indian basket having declined to around US $ 47/bbl in the week ending 16.4.2005.

With a view to containing the burden of the increase in international prices on consumers of diesel and petrol, it was decided that the burden should be equitably shared also by the Government and Oil Companies. Thus, Government reduced the excise duty on petrol and diesel by 4% and 3% respectively effective 16.6.04. Effective 19.8.04, the excise duty on petrol and diesel was further reduced by 3%. The Government also reduced customs duty by 5% each on petrol and diesel with effect from 19/8/04. In the Budget 2005-06, a reduction in custom duty on crude from 10% to 5% and in other petroleum products from 15-20% to 10% was announced.

Public Sector Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) have not passed on the full increase in international prices to the domestic consumer prices of these products. Although, with effect from 1st August 2004, Government had worked out a price band mechanism, allowing OMCs freedom to revise the prices of petrol and diesel within the prescribed price band, the steep and volatile increase in the international prices of crude oil resulted in the ceiling of the price band being breached within weeks of its being made operational resulting in the mechanism being placed in abeyance.

The pricing mechanism attempts to balance the interests of various stakeholders, *viz.*, Consumers, Government and Oil Companies. The burden borne by oil companies will, of course, go up to the extent that domestic prices are not revised upwards when international prices shoot up, but it is hoped that when international prices stabilize, or Government so decides, the price band mechanism might be restored. It may be noted that private sector companies are free to fix their prices.

Safety of women at airports

*365. SHRI TARIQ ANWAR: Will the Minister of CIVIL AVIATION be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that airports remain unsafe for women;

(b) if so, the reasons therefor; and